

ORIGIN/ACTION

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AIRGRAM

DEPARTMENT OF STATE

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NO.

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TO : Department of State
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FROM : Amembassy GUATEMALA

DATE: January 25, 1977

SUBJECT: Monthly Report on Political Violence and Human Rights
 December 1976

REF

SUMMARY: December, with only 15 incidents of political violence, was the second quietest month in 1976 and the third relatively quiet month in succession. The Army uncovered a 23-man "guerrilla support unit" in El Peten Department. The EGP exploited an industrial labor dispute and bombed the employer's home. The PGT/FAR also got into the bomb business by targeting the homes of bus company owners involved in a Guatemala City bus lockout. END SUMMARY.

December tied with October for the second quietest month in 1976, surpassed only by the earthquake month of February. There were only 15 press-reported incidents of probable political violence, including two kidnappings, one incident of wounding and seven murders. The other five incidents involved bombs that caused only property damage. Seven of the incidents took place in Guatemala Department, four on the south coast, three in El Peten, and one in El Quiché.

In total number of incidents this was the third relatively quiet month in a row. In October, November, and December there were a total of 55 incidents, an average of 18 per month, compared to an average of 34 incidents per month from January through October (excepting February). It is too early, however, to say that the level of violence has subsided because in recent years the last three months of each year have generally been the least violent. Considering the dramatic successes of the EGP in November and the rapidly approaching political campaign it is very possible that this lower level of violence will not be sustained.

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Enter El Petén. For the first time in recent history, several of the month's incidents occurred in the Department of El Petén. In early December a group of alleged guerrillas dressed in olive-green uniforms and armed with submachine guns killed two campesinos in San Francisco, a small town located on the Chixoy River where the Mexican border meets the borders of the Departments of El Petén, Alta Verapaz, and El Quiché. Later in the month two campesinos in eastern El Petén were kidnapped by two men posing as military commissioners.

The most interesting incident in El Petén this month is not included in the December statistics. On December 1 the Army announced that the previous November 21 they had captured 23 illiterate campesino members of a guerrilla support group. The campesinos, who had immigrated to the municipality of Sayaxche, El Petén, in 1973 and 1974 under a land distribution program, claimed they had been forced under threat of death by the EGP to give them food and money. After questioning, all but two campesinos were released, and promised Army protection from the guerrillas. The other two were held for allegedly killing two other campesinos who had refused to cooperate with the EGP.

[REDACTED] There has been no other report of EGP activity in the Petén, except along the border with Quiché, the department which apparently is the guerrilla headquarters.

EGP-Only One Incident. The only violence attributable to the EGP in December involved the tossing of three bombs at the home of industrialist Claudio Julio Gottlieb Techner, the owner of a factory that has been having labor troubles. The bombs partially destroyed his car and caused serious damage to his home which is located in a residential area only a few blocks away from several Embassy personnel. Of note is that this is the first time that the EGP has exploited an industrial labor dispute. On the sidewalk they painted "Death to the enemies of the workers."

PGT/FAR, Bombs and Buses. While the three bombs above were counted as one incident because they were directed at the same target four other bombs set off against the homes of various bus company owners are counted separately. The bus owners were targeted because they had pulled their buses off the streets in mid-December in a dispute with the Guatemala City municipal government over subsidies and other grievances. Property damage to the homes was light to moderate [REDACTED]

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